

The Newark Housing Authority's

Welfare to Work Strategic Plan



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Program Summary

The Newark Housing Authority after having been awarded 700 WtW Section 8 Vouchers launched an intense campaign to lease-up qualified families. NHA first exhausted its existing waiting list and after providing all designated families with assistance, realized it had to advertise the availability of this special allocation.

NHA faced several challenges while having to lease-up families. First, families were required to meet the standard criteria set by HUD (income and criminal history, etc.) Record Checks inevitably delayed the lease-up process. Second, families had to provide proof that they were in compliance with Work First New Jersey (WFNJ) rules and regulations. Once we overcame these delays, families who had worked hard to become economically independent were finally rewarded with housing subsidy.

Having almost met our lease-up goal, we are now faced with yet another challenge: NHA has depleted its WtW Section 8 waiting list. In our strategic plan, we have illustrated steps to insure that the program will continue. For example, NHA plans to advertise again the availability of this special housing choice voucher as well as meet with WFNJ staff in order to strengthen our partnership and solicit their assistance in selecting qualified families. NHA hopes to be able to create a WtW waiting list so that in the event that a WtW voucher becomes available (through the termination of a family or a turnover) it can be issued immediately.

Another challenge identified by NHA staff has been the failure of families to remain in compliance with WFNJ rules and regulations. NHA currently assists WtW families by offering in-house community supportive service programs such as: The Family Self-Sufficiency Program, which currently has enrolled 60 WtW families, and The Workplace Literacy Program, which has serviced a total of 72 WtW families. NHA also partners with neighboring social service agencies in order to provide a wider variety of services. If a family, at the time of recertification, is found not to be in compliance, they are given a maximum 120 days to become compliant or lose their Section 8. NHA staff works with the family to assist them in becoming compliant during this time period.

Currently, the Authority is creating a tracking mechanism which will track families who have a change in their rent portion due to earned income. We are interested in celebrating the progress of our WtW families. We hope that this tracking mechanism could also monitor non-compliant families and their allotted grace period. It is necessary to insure that families continue to be committed to becoming economically independent or otherwise give another deserving family the opportunity. Nevertheless, we are pleased to report that no families have been terminated from the program. We will continue to give all our support to those families who express the determination and commitment to becoming self-sufficient.

I. LEASING

PHASE I

The NHA Section 8 Department has extinguished all traditional and non-traditional avenues to insure that the residents of the City of Newark had ample opportunity to apply for a WtW Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher.

- NHA was awarded 700 Vouchers.
- Section 8 purged its existing waiting list and selected all qualifying WtW families
- Advertised for the WtW Section 8 Vouchers
- Created a waiting list
- Leased 694 which yields a 99% lease-up rate
- 15% of the leased families have either enrolled in the FSS Program or the Workplace Literacy Program. Most have obtained employment and all are in compliance.
- To date there is 0 turnover

PHASE II

Presently, the Authority has depleted the Welfare to Work Section 8 waiting list. Although there are a number of families still looking for apartments and others waiting to complete the process, according to our calculations there are still not enough families on file to fill possible vacancies and possible turnovers. Therefore, the following methods will be explored in order to address this issue.

- NHA will advertise the availability of WtW Section 8 Vouchers
- WtW Coordinator will meet with the State Department of Family Development to insure their continued financial support of the Voucher Program. The State has provided the Authority with monies to help families with security deposits, moving expenses, and utility deposits.
- WtW Coordinator will meet with the Director of the Essex County Welfare Department in order to enforce the existing partnership between the Housing Authority and TANF Case Managers. It is necessary to have their cooperation in reporting the compliance status of current and future housing assistance recipients.
- WtW Coordinator will provide WFNJ Case Managers, Employment Specialists and other related staff with a Section 8 orientation in which the WtW Section 8 Housing Voucher will be explained. NHA will emphasize the need for these families to be in compliance at the time of application and throughout the term in which they receive this type of rental assistance. WFNJ Staff may make referrals to NHA and NHA will insure that these families are contacted and advised on how to apply for subsidy.
- The Section 8 Director will continue to advertise the Section 8 Program at landlord trade shows in order to recruit new landlords to the program.
- NHA Section 8 Staff will organize and facilitate a landlord information workshop that will brief them on the program and the leasing process.
- NHA may have to consider leasing families out of the City of Newark if the private renting market becomes any more stringent.

II. HELPING WtW FAMILIES TO BE SUCESSFUL

CURRENT INITIATIVE

During the Section 8 Program orientation, families are informed of the rules and regulations governing the WtW Housing Voucher. We stress to families that the voucher, which they are about to receive, is a direct result of their willingness to become economically independent by complying with the rules and regulations of the Workfirst New Jersey Program.

At this time families are strongly encouraged to enroll in the Family Self-Sufficiency Program. The FSS Program Coordinator will present the families with a brief orientation and an information pamphlet.

In addition to the FSS Program, families are briefed on the Workplace Literacy Program (WLP). The WLP is a partnership program between the Newark Housing Authority and the Department of Labor and New Jersey Network. This program was designed to assist applicants in improving their job marketing skills and educational level. Once a participant completes their training course, they are assigned to a job counselor and continued to receive supportive services until gainful employment is obtained.

Family Self Sufficiency Program Success Rate

1. Number of WtW families currently enrolled in FSS	60
2. Number of WtW families currently enrolled in an activity	37
3. Number of WtW families currently employed	29
4. Number of WtW families who have an escrow account	6

* The Newark Housing Authority's FSS Program has a maximum program size of 100 families.

Workplace Literacy Program Success Rate

1. Number of WtW families serviced by the WLP	72
2. Number of WtW families currently working	58
3. Number of WtW families currently enrolled in an activity	4
4. Number of WtW families dropped out	2
5. Number of WtW families that pursued higher education	2

FUTURE INITIATIVE

One of the obstacles that the Authority has had to face is the pessimistic attitude that prevails in the mindset of the WtW Head of Household. This participant has probably been enrolled in many activities in an effort to preserve their full grant, but have not been able to excel because they lack the basic skills necessary to obtain and maintain employment. Both social service programs at the NHA address these issues. Our programs are very successful because we begin with the basics and build. We will continue to market our programs not as simply another required activity, but a better approach to self-improvement.

To increase enrollment in both FSS and the WLP, NHA proposes to:

- Distribute to all leased families (via mail) program information along with success stories.
- Remind families that in order to continue to receive housing subsidy they must remain in compliance with WFNJ rules and regulations and (the Authority can assist them in becoming compliant).
- Meet with WFNJ Staff and promote the programs so that can encourage participation.
- Inform them of the homeownership opportunities that currently exist in Section 8.
- NHA plans to expand its Workplace Literacy Program to include evening and weekend classes. This flexible schedule is implemented in hopes to attract participants that are experiencing schedule conflicts.

As a result of this initiative, it is the intention of the Family Self-Sufficiency Program to enroll additional 20 WtW families by March 2002. It is the intention of the WLP to provide classes to a maximum of 30 new students (day and evening) every eight weeks.

Both of these programs recruit families from a WtW Lease Master List. This master list provides general information as well as the amount of rent that each family has to pay. Priority is given to families paying low to minimum rent (\$50.00) because they are deemed to be in most need of social services. Other families expressing an interest to enroll in the programs are serviced upon the availability of a vacancy.

III. PARTNERSHIPS AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES

The Department of Labor, New Jersey Network and the Newark Housing Authority have formulated a partnership that has allowed NHA to provide in-house job training and educational courses. This partnership has funded the Workplace Literacy program, which has met with a great success rate. (as illustrated above)

In addition, the Newark housing Authority is surrounded by a vast number of both public and private agencies that are committed to providing a wide range of supportive services. Several of these agencies have entered into formal partnership and collaborations with NHA.

Some of NHA's existing partnership in the delivery of services are:

- **La Casa de Don Pedro** – Offers more than 20 programs, which include counseling, child care education, mentoring, job training and placement homelessness prevention, energy conservation, leadership development, community economic development. La Casa's staff of more than 100 full-time employees work to create an atmosphere of hope and optimism with a framework of community building.
- **FOCUS** – Offers a variety of educational and job training programs for adults such as: GED, ESL and the Extension Program for Essex County College students. It has a Youth Division that provides after school and summer camp programs. In addition, it is the other City of Newark pilot site for The Workplace Literacy Program.
- **New Community Corporation** – Public access to One-Stop computers for posting resumes and searching for jobs. Training opportunities are available in the occupational areas of: security guard, home health aide, computer repair technician, bank teller/customer service representative. In addition training is provided for building trades, office computer skills, culinary arts, medical billing clerk and medical assistant. NCC offers a four week hand-on training in job search techniques, including access on the Internet to Workforce New Jersey's One-Stop web-site (including Job Bank, Resume Bank, directories of training opportunities, services, etc.)
- **North Ward Center** – Participants in the Center's programs have access to computers with Internet connections for conducting job searches and posting resumes Childhood Development Center for ages 21/2 – 51/2 Adult and youth crisis intervention, in cooperation with the NJ Division of Youth and Family Services Collaboration in the Branch Brook Park recreational cultural program, emphasizing leadership development, responsibility and discipline.
- **Newark Business Training Institute** – Participants in the Center's programs have access to computers with Internet connections for conducting job searches and posting resumes. Training in general, medical and legal office skills, GED English as a Second Language, Adult Basic Education, and Workforce foundation skills. The center offers assistance in obtaining and retaining employment. Computer access on the Internet to Workforce New Jersey's One-Stop web site (including Job Bank, Resume Bank, directories of training opportunities, services, etc.) Assistance, if needed, in the use of the computers. Training of senior citizens to be child care attendants.
- **Career Works** – Provide quality education, training and job placement services that enables participants to compete for employment opportunities and reach their full potential in the areas of: Clerical/word processing, computerized customer service/sales, ESL, home health aide, hotel services, maintenance and light construction, medical office skills and office assistant.

- **Catholic Community Services** – Drug and alcohol addiction screening, treatment (including detoxification)) and supportive services as well as preventive education programs. Mental health programs, out patient and partial care for AIDS/HIV-positive persons. Children and family services available are: Parenting skills, audio and other diagnostic testing, speech, occupational and physical therapy, psychological evaluation, family therapy, special clinical and supportive services for families who are adopting children with special need, child day care and after-school programs, adult protective services. Youth programs: leadership training, computer literacy training, etc., as well as special education schools and alternative high school. Employee assistance program---assists employees in constructively dealing with alcoholism, addiction, emotional, legal and other problems that may impede their effectiveness as employees. HUD approved homeownership counseling.

Challenge 1:

Although NHA has a working relationship with the Welfare Office (TANF), but it has become a very apparent that we need to strengthen that relationship in order to provide quality service to our applicant and WtW Section 8 housing recipients. It has become a difficult task for Section 8 staff to confirm an applicant's state of compliance.

Proposed Solution

1. We developed a form to improve efficiency and accuracy when reporting a compliance status.
2. We intend to conduct information workshops at WNFJ offices in order to promote cooperation.
3. Include WFNJ staff in the advertising of the availability WtW vouchers, but allowing them to make referrals to Section 8 (Section 8 staff will then instruct referred families on how to apply for subsidy).

Challenge 2:

Although both the FSS Program and the WLP track the progress of their participants, NHA would like to be able to track the progress of all its WtW families.

Proposed Solution

1. A database will need to be created and monitored in order to track WtW families who experience a change in their rent due to earned income.
2. WtW Section 8 Case Managers should forward interim rent changes that illustrate an increase in earned income to the staff person assigned to monitor the data base. Hence, statistics regarding the success of increase earned income in the WtW households can be calculated.

Challenge 3:

WtW Section 8 Case ;Managers have indicated that some WtW ;head of household are having a substance abuse problem which prevents them from maintaining a compliance status with WFNJ.

Proposed Solution

NHA has adopted a policy, which allows WtW recipients a grace period of 60 days in order to become in compliance in order to continue to receive subsidy. After the initial 60 days, if the tenant proves to have experienced hardships, an additional 60 days will be awarded. For drug dependent head of households, NHA is willing to extend the grace period an additional 30 days after the first 120 days, if and when the head of household proves to have enrolled in a substance abuse program.